



## *Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Candice Miller (R-MI)  
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security  
Committee on Homeland Security**

**“Port of Entry Infrastructure: How Does the Federal Government Prioritize Investments?”**

**Remarks as Prepared**

Our nation relies on the efficient flow of commerce across our border, and it is the job of U.S. Customs and Border Protection to not only facilitate commerce, but also secure the homeland.

To accomplish this mission, sufficient port of entry infrastructure is needed along with robust Customs and Border Protection staffing.

CBP’s important mission not only keeps America safe, but also ensures tens of thousands of American jobs and billions of dollars in commerce come to the country through trade with Canada and Mexico.

A significant portion of the trade with Canada, our number one trading partner, and Mexico, our number two trading partner, cross nearly 170 land ports of entry every day. It goes without saying that delays and backups caused by old and inadequate infrastructure cost businesses millions of dollars in lost opportunity.

This is especially true with just-in-time manufacturing, critical to the auto industry in my home state of Michigan. With this being the case, quick cross-border movement is essential. Simply put, if auto parts do not make it across the border in a timely fashion, production lines shut down.

As our economy and security requirements grow, our ports of entry must be able to accommodate more trucks, passengers and cargo, while at the same time allowing the people who cross the border each day convenient and secure travel.

How CBP and the Federal Government as whole prioritize the need to expand and update existing ports while also planning for new ports is neither clear nor transparent. It is, in fact, quite complicated.

While several land ports of entry projects were included in the President's budget request this Committee has not been provided significant information on CBP's strategic plan for port of entry modernization and construction for future projects.

This committee has asked for a list of CBP's port of entry priorities, but thus far CBP has been unwilling to share that list with this Committee.

This lack of transparency is troubling, to put it kindly. CBP cannot continue to be a big black hole when it comes to Ports of Entry infrastructure needs, which can significantly impact both trade facilitation and homeland security.

Many Members of this Committee, myself included, have ports of entry in their districts, many of which need improvement. We would like to know where on the list these projects fall, and more importantly, how CBP determines how these projects rank.

Surely, that is something CBP should and can defend to the membership of this Committee. We should not have to issue a subpoena to get routine information out of this agency.

In my own district, we have the Blue Water Bridge Plaza expansion – a project that has been in the planning stages for more than a decade. The Port Huron community and the state of Michigan have worked tirelessly to meet the design and planning demands of CBP throughout the process.

Homes and businesses in the proposed expansion site were condemned and demolished to allow for a plaza to meet the needs of CBP. The destruction was based a promise to build this needed plaza that hasn't been fulfilled.

A full 60 acres of tax base have been removed from the rolls putting great stress on a community that has been under further stress of the difficult economy. And our Canadian partners have expanded the customs plaza on their side of the bridge years ago with the understanding that the American side of the bridge would also have a plaza upgrade. And like the people of Port Huron, they are also still waiting for the United States government to hold up their end of the bargain.

We are shovel ready in Port Huron, but the funding never seems to come through. City and State leaders have worked with CBP and the Michigan Department of Transportation to revise the plan in an effort to reduce the cost.

It seems to me that the Blue Water Bridge Plaza, the second busiest border crossing on the northern tier, should be at the head of the line for Northern border ports of entry. It is not an artist rendering. It actually exists.

And some in our state would also like to add a new crossing in Detroit, but there has been no guidance from CBP on how to move forward with any of these projects.

I am certainly mindful of the tough budget times we are in. As a nation, we need to make tough choices when it comes to the limited dollars available for port of entry construction.

But the crossing of goods and services across the border helps to grow our economy and tax base – it's not frivolous spending; it's an investment in our future economic growth and prosperity which also would help to add money to the treasury and ease our budget problems.

That is why I fully support concepts like public-private-partnerships and other innovative ways to fund infrastructure improvements. I support section 560 and 559 language that was included in the most recent appropriation bill that allows for reimbursable agreements, and the ability of organizations to offer donations.

The goal of this hearing is to better understand CBP's criteria for prioritizing land ports of entry, determine how they decide to fund projects, and explore the role that public-private partnerships, and other unique approaches to financing, may play in moving the process along.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the GSA works collaboratively with CBP to identify priority projects, and ensure funding is provided in the Federal Buildings Fund, which port of entry infrastructure must compete with other Federal priorities.

Ports of Entry across the nation are in dire need of modernization and expansion. I believe we need to tap into the expertise of the private sector, and partner with them to come up with better, more cost effective approaches to new port of entry construction.

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